

VZCZCXRO3009
OO RUEHAST
DE RUEHBM #0847/01 1421604
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 221604Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4479
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHRC/USDA WASHDC
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 000847

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NCE - WSILKWORTH AND CA/OCS/ACS-SSCHMIERER
NSC FOR DAMON WILSON

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [CASC](#) [WHO](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA SPREADS TO BUCHAREST, OTHER MAJOR CITIES

REF: A) BUCHAREST 843; B) BUCHAREST 834; C) BUCHAREST 811; D) BUCHAREST 523; E) BUCHAREST 310; F) BUCHAREST 79; G) 05 BUCHAREST 2302; H) 05 BUCHAREST 2239; I) 05 BUCHAREST 2205, J) 05 BUCHAREST 2185; K) 05 BUCHAREST 2177, L) 05 BUCHAREST 2152

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The latest outbreak of avian influenza (AI) in Romania continues to spread over nearly one third of the country. A total of 34 sites in nine counties have been confirmed as H5N1 positive, with another 24 sites under suspicion pending confirmation. In Bucharest, dead domestic poultry in one neighborhood within the city limits has been confirmed H5N1 positive, with another neighborhood suspected. The outbreak has prompted the first quarantine measures within the city limits themselves. Other large cities in Romania have also reported their first confirmed cases of avian influenza. Veterinary officials continue to enforce quarantine procedures and implement culling, disinfection, surveillance and testing in affected areas. President Basescu, until now less visible on this issue than other top Romanian officials, met with Prime Minister Tariceanu and Minister of Agriculture Flutur to discuss the crisis.

OUTBREAKS ON THE INCREASE

2. (U) Since the detection of the initial outbreak last week in three commercial farms located near the city of Brasov, the disease has continued to spread rapidly. The increase in outbreaks has been attributed to the sale and transport of live birds originating from these commercial farms.

3. (U) As of May 22, a total of 34 outbreaks have been confirmed in nine counties and the city of Bucharest. The outbreaks are primarily centered in Brasov County, which is home to the two commercial production facilities believed to be the source of the outbreaks.

4. (U) The breakdown on locations of confirmed H5N1 cases is as follows: 19 in Brasov County (Hurez, Beclean, Fagaras, Feldioara de Ucea, Soars, Dumbravita, Vistea de Jos, Codlea, Bod, Lovnic, Holbav, Venetia de Jos, Racos, Stupini, Maierus, Cristian, Recea as well as the two commercial poultry farms of SC Drakom Silva and SC Pati Prod); one in Covasna County (Sita Buzaului); four in Vrancea County (Gagesti de Bolotesti, Anghel esti, Jorasti,

Panciu); three in Bacau County (Beleghet de Agas, Palanca, Margiresti); one in Buzau County (Valea Lupului); two in Sibiu County (city of Sibiu - pop. 155,000, Arpasu de Jos); two in Valcea County (Stoilesti, Horezu); one in Neamt County (Trifesti); one in Bucharest (Sector 2).

15. (U) In addition to the 34 confirmed outbreaks reported above, another 24 localities are under suspicion for AI, but are still pending confirmation. The location of these suspected cases is also concentrated around Brasov County and is as follows: eight in Brasov County (Barcut, Parau, Comana de Jos, Sambata de Sus, Ucea de Jos, Vulcan, Sanpetru, Rotbav); two in Buzau County (Patarlagele, Florica de Mihailesti); three in Vrancea County (Unirea, Pietroasa de Bolotesti, Focsani); two in Valcea County (Galicea, Ocnele Mari); six in Prahova County (two locations in the city of Ploiesti, Urleta, Boldesti-Scaieni, and Tinosu, Poiana Campina); one in Alba County (Santimbru); one in Mures County (Sighisoara); and one in Bucharest (Sector 4).

AI HITS THE CAPITAL

16. (U) On May 22, officials confirmed the presence of H5N1 in Bucharest, Romania's capital and largest city. Of the two cases under suspicion, only one has been confirmed, in Sector 2 in the northeastern outskirts of the city. This area surrounding Falticeni Street is a low-income neighborhood marked by old houses with no plumbing where backyard poultry is common. A second case identified in Sector 4 in the southern outskirts of the city has tested positive in rapid tests, but has yet to be confirmed. The neighborhood surrounding Odei Street is also a low-income one with backyard fowl, though it is surrounded by densely populated blocks of apartments.

17. (U) In Sector 2, authorities estimate that some 400 households are raising an estimated 4,000 domestic birds.

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Veterinary officials and local authorities have implemented quarantine around 21 streets in the immediate proximity of the urban outbreaks. A public school in the vicinity of the outbreak has been temporarily closed. Media reports suggest that approximately 1,500 Bucharest residents are directly affected by the quarantine restrictions. Authorities are disinfecting the streets and public walkways, prohibiting transit through the immediate areas, visiting residents in order to inspect their households and livestock, distributing Tamiflu, providing sanitary and health information, and testing for additional cases. Bucharest's chief veterinarian has reported that authorities are considering ordering a ban on poultry raised within the city limits, which if implemented, could lead to the destruction of an additional 40,000 birds.

ROMANIA TAKING ACTION, LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

18. (U) With the arrival of avian influenza, either confirmed or suspected, in the cities of Bucharest, Brasov, Ploiesti, and Sibiu, the disruptions that accompany traffic restrictions and quarantine measures are much more apparent than they were when the AI epidemic was limited to a relatively small number of isolated rural locations. Still, Minister of Agriculture Gheorghe Flutur emphasized over the weekend in a round of media appearances that the situation is beginning to stabilize. Flutur reported that veterinary officials have finished culling over 100,000 birds at the Drakom Silva poultry farm, considered the epicenter of the latest outbreaks. They are currently culling another 600,000 birds belonging to Pati Prod, the nearby poultry farm in Codlea. Police in Brasov County continued their investigation, with the manager of Pati Prod the latest to be arrested over the weekend.

19. (U) Romanian politics have also been infected in recent days by the bird virus. President Basescu met with

Tariceanu and Flutur over the weekend to discuss GOR efforts to contain the outbreak and investigate the cause. Tariceanu has called for a country-wide probe of poultry producers to ensure that all are following bio-safety regulations. According to press reports, Basescu is considering assigning the Romanian intelligence services to help identify those responsible for the outbreak. The press has also quoted Minister Flutur as speculating that the outbreak was caused by illegal imports of live birds. Meanwhile, opposition head Mircea Geona (PSD - Social Democrats) has called for Minister Flutur's dismissal.

COMMENT

10. (SBU) Rumors and accusations are filling the pages of the Romanian press as the GOR attempts to get a handle on the crisis. Opposition leaders are trying to capitalize, pointing to the latest events as an example of the coalition's ineptitude. With evidence mounting that malfeasance lies behind the rash of avian influence, the governing coalition is under considerable pressure to get to the bottom of this outbreak quickly and ensure it does not repeat. European Commission officials have expressed past concern over Romania's ability to ensure animal health. This latest crisis will only exacerbate these concerns. End comment.

TAUBMAN